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WOODEN SPOIL

By Victor Rousseau Illustrations by Lewin Myers Copyright, 1919, by George H. Doran Co.

Brousseau advanced and banged his fist on the desk. "I've come here to tell you that you're a fool, young man," he answered. "My word goes in this part of the country, and you can't come in here and fight me."

"Your proposal, please," said Hilary quietly.

"Now you're talking sense. This ain't the United States, where you rich men can come into a territory and grab it away from the people under their noses. You'll put Mr. Morris back as manager and go home, or else you'll sell out to me."

"Yes, it does come to about the same thing," said Hilary. "Why don't you ask me to make you a free gift of the concession?"

Brousseau scowled savagely at the sarcasm. He was educated enough to be stung by banter, but not quick enough to retaliate in kind.

"Now I'll make you my own proposition," said Hilary. "It's this. You can either submit your books to my inspection and make good on that lumber that Morris stole from me last year, or keep your men on your own limits, or you can give up the mill rights after October first and build your own mill."

Brousseau turned white with rage. "I'll run you out of this country," he raved. "I'll freeze you out before the winter's over, Monsieur Askew. You watch me!"

"Maybe," said Hilary. "Meanwhile, I think you're keeping the buggy waiting, and there is no use in prolonging this conversation unless you want to accept my terms."

Brousseau shook with wrath; he opened his mouth to speak, but snorted instead; he shook his fist furiously and, turning upon his heel, stamped out of the office. From his desk Hilary watched him climb into the buggy and drive away. His head was bent toward Madeleine Rosny's, and he was talking emphatically and gesticulating freely.

"War's declared," said Hilary to himself, with relief, as he settled himself in his chair.

Hilary talked the matter over with Lefe later in the day. "If we can get a good shipment out before the Gulf closes," he said, "we can carry on till spring. But of course we can't haul lumber out of the woods until there's several feet of snow on the ground."

"And that won't be till navigation's ended for the year," said Lefe.

"So I'm going to put through the mill every cord of lumber in the river," continued Hilary. "We'll keep Dupont busy. And we'll wind up the year with a substantial balance to our credit."

"The Ste. Marie lumber," mused Lefe.

"I guess they call it so. But I believe it's all ours. We've got the whip hand of Brousseau there, because it's our mill, and Dupont's independent of Brousseau. Brousseau can't stop me using that lumber, and he daren't go to law about it."

Lefe approved the scheme, with warnings to Hilary about going slow. They went up to the dam and looked over the logs in the river. Riviere Rocheuse was packed as far as the eye could reach. The sight raised Hilary's spirits. There must be thousands of dollars' worth of lumber in between the high banks, ready to be passed through the crossing mill for Dupont's schooner.

Lefe came to him next day. "The logs in the dam are going into the mill all right," he said, "but they ain't coming down-stream above it. Baptiste says there's a jam in the gorge."

"They got the rig and drove to the spot. At the gorge was a solid wall of logs, packed like the straw coverings of wine-bottles. The starting of the logs had wedged them together here. It was clear that it would be necessary to start the mass with dynamite."

"I guess that's the trick," said Lefe.

"Baptiste here is an expert dynamiter. 'Yes, that shift him quick,' said Jean-Marie. 'Mighty quick, maybe. I think Mr. Askew, it is better first to make stronger your boom, or else your lumber go over the rapids into the Gulf.'"

"How long will it take?" asked Hilary.

"A week, maybe, for good work. That boom, he will never stand so many logs as that, Mr. Askew."

"Get a gang to work at daybreak tomorrow," Hilary instructed him.

That night Hilary congratulated himself on having started his counter-offensive against Brousseau. In spite of the man's influence in the district, he felt assured of the loyalty of the bulk of his men. Lefe was worth a hundred and little Baptiste knew his job perfectly. He went to bed in high spirits.

The next morning Brousseau struck his first blow. Hilary had just ordered the rig in order to drive over to Leblanc's lease and try to stop the operations about the Chateau when Leblanc appeared in the office, accompanied by four ruffians whom Hilary recognized as the subjobbers.

"Well, Leblanc?" asked Hilary.

"What's this I hear you make complaint about my work?" Leblanc demanded.

"You've been cutting round the Chateau, Leblanc, and you'll have to stop it," said Hilary. "You knew you were not supposed to cut there."

"Ain't I got right to cut on my own lease?" demanded the jobber truculently.

"Maybe you have, but anyway you aren't going to cut round the Chateau."

"You think so?" asked Leblanc insolently. "All right. You find another boss jobber. Maybe you find one in September what couldn't get a job for next winter, you are so clever. I don't know. For me, I go to work for Monsieur Morris at Ste. Marie."

"So that's your game, Leblanc! How about that contract?"

"That's all right. But if I don't pay on January first, the contract is no good. That was your words, which you wrote down. Well, I keep the lease if you like, Monsieur Askew, an' I cut where I like, or I don't pay one cent. An' these men say they go wherever I go. They won't work for you if I go, because you thrash Black Pierre. They ain't dogs, they're men, an' they got families. They don't stand for no beating with fists. Maybe you change your mind about cutting?"

"Go to the devil!" shouted Hilary.

"Maybe you like to beat these men now, eh?" sneered Leblanc. "No? All right. You find other boss jobber Monsieur Askew."

He clapped on his hat, and, as if they had rehearsed the scene, the four ruffians followed Leblanc in solemn and triumphant parade across the floor and out of the office.

This was first blood with a vengeance. Leblanc's lease was a necessity; it meant money, and money just

when his capital would be exhausted. It was essential to sub-lease the tract to some one else. But there was no one in St. Boniface capable of assuming charge of such a contract.

The habitants had no heads for business and no money to invest. All that was paid out in wages flowed back to the store, owned by the Ste. Marie company, and to the Ste. Marie saloons. Ste. Marie was bleeding St. Boniface white in every way.

Filled with resentment, Hilary countermanded the order for the rig and walked up by the mill. His nerves were raw and quivering as he reached the end of the strip of land where Rocky river pours into the gulf below. The whistle blew, and he turned toward St. Boniface and stopped, watching the mob of men emerging from the mill.

How far could he count on them?

To the last penny, perhaps, and literally. Their jobs would hold them to him in spite of Brousseau, just so long as their wages were forthcoming. Probably nine-tenths of them resented his presence in their country. His victory over Black Pierre had raised him in their estimation; they might hate him instead of despising him, but that was all. He could count on the devotion and faithfulness of perhaps one man besides Lefe Connell—little Baptiste.

The gang was hard at work below the dam, strengthening the structure of the boom. Riviere Rocheuse, pouring down from the foothills of the Laurentians, speeds with great force through the gorge above St. Boniface, widens opposite the settlement, and gathering its waters there, shoots straight as a dart over the broken cliff into the gulf.

If, when the jam was broken, the pressure of the great mass of logs proved too strong for the boom, instead of passing into the flume they would pour over the cataraict into the St. Lawrence, where their retrieval would be impossible. Such an accident had happened on a small scale once before. If it should happen now the loss would end all Hilary's hopes.

He was glad Baptiste had seen this Hilary searched for the figure of the little timekeeper and general utility man, but failed to find it.

He ascended the hill beside the rushing cataraict. He was crossing the waste land where the logs and timbers were strewn when he saw Jean-Marie. The little man was engaged in earnest conversation with Black Pierre behind a shed. Black Pierre seemed to be protesting vigorously.

The presence of the man beside Baptiste came to Hilary with a shock. Without changing his pace he advanced toward them, in his mind repeating Lefe's advice over and over.

He was still inwardly quivering, yet trying to appear unconcerned, when the two perceived him. Pierre turned toward him with a scowl on his bruised face. His eyes were blackened, and he looked the incarnation of malignancy.

He spoke to Baptiste quickly, and to Hilary's surprise Baptiste, without acknowledging his presence, walked slowly away with him. Baptiste's sudden departure puzzled Hilary a good deal at the time, and much more afterward.

WE PRINT BUTTER WRAPPERS.

CHAPTER V.

Marie Dupont.

Lefe was as independent as Hilary over Leblanc's treachery. Hilary had only one cause for satisfaction in the situation, and that was a purely personal one. He was glad that Leblanc's cancellation of the contract had left the Chateau grounds immune, and so had neutralized Brousseau's first move in the campaign.

What galled him was the reflection that in this field which Brousseau had thrust upon him he was fighting Madeleine too. He shrank from the thought of Madeleine Rosny as Brousseau's wife; he tried to think of her as sacrificing herself for her father's sake. But this picture would not hold together; she was most evidently acquainted with Brousseau's designs, and approved of them.

On the day after the interview with Leblanc a new development occurred. Lefe, who had been grumbling all day, came into the office and flung down his hat in utter dejection.

"Something new?" asked Hilary.

"There's talk of a strike," said Lefe in disgust. "Brousseau has had his men at work among 'em, and they're saying that you're keeping wages down, and that Brousseau would give two dollars a day if you would."

"He wants to get into my capital, eh?"

"It's just one way of hitting us. I tell you, Mr. Askew, it's a tough job we've taken on. You know these men ain't got sense. Simeon Duval has been handing out free drinks in that shebeen of his at Ste. Marie, and telling them what a hard master you are, and they're just swallowing it."

"We'll face that trouble when it develops," answered Hilary.

But Hilary did some hard thinking, and it settled about Dupont. If Brousseau could buy out Dupont he was finished; he could never get a lumber schooner that year, and he must get out some shipments before navigation closed. He decided to appeal to Father Lucien to help him out in this difficulty.

But Father Lucien forestalled him with a visit that evening. He was agreeably surprised by the warmth of his welcome, heard Hilary attentively, and at once volunteered to assist him. "But there will be no trouble, monsieur," he said, "Captain Dupont is independent, and he does not love the Ste. Marie people."

"Father Lucien," said Hilary. "I was going to have a talk with you later about certain things that are objectionable—the liquor trade, for instance."

Father Lucien stopped and thumped his stick upon the chitpewren sand.

"Now that is exactly what was in my mind when I started out to see you today, Monsieur Askew," he answered. "They are bad people over at Ste. Marie, and they are making St. Boniface as bad as they are. They laugh at me when I speak to them. It is bad; but it cannot go on. Monsieur Askew, as I said to you the day I see you, I hope we shall be friends. Now I know we shall be, and, please God, we shall at least keep the brandy out of St. Boniface."

They stopped and shook hands upon their compact, and then went on together, past the straggling outskirts of the village, beyond the wharf, until they reached Dupont's cottage.

The cure tapped at the door. Within Hilary could hear the murmur of voices, which suddenly ceased. Then there came the splutter of a match, and the flame of a lamp. Hilary saw a girl's figure in silhouette against the shade.

It was that of Marie Dupont, the captain's daughter, and Hilary remembered that there was some mystery about her; he had seen her going her solitary way about the village, ignored by all and ignoring all.

At the same time he saw another figure slinking away into the shadows of the pines. Father Lucien saw it too, and darted forward and caught it by the arm, and drew it toward the beach.

It was a girl of about four and twenty, with a foolish, weak face and gaudy finery.

"Nanette Bonnat," said the cure



"Nanette Bonnat," said the Cure Very Sternly, "How Often Have I Forbidden Thee to Come Here?"

very sternly, "how often have I forbidden thee to come here?"

"Let me go!" cried the girl, whimpering and struggling.

The door opened and Marie Dupont stood on the threshold. The flickering light of the lamp within fell on

the other half in shadow. "I face was pretty, but sad, embittered, and rather hard. The cure, still holding Nanette by the arms, turned toward Marie.

"So my instructions count for nothing!" he said angrily.

"Well, why should she not come here, Monsieur Tessier?" demanded Marie Dupont. "Have I so many friends in St. Boniface that I should turn from those few I have? In Ste. Marie they are glad to see me. Is it so wrong that I should go there with my friend as dance sometimes, when the doors of St. Boniface are closed to me?"

The ringing scorn in her voice was characteristic of some latent strength; she seemed to Hilary like one who has been hammered into strength upon the anvil of life.

Father Lucien released Nanette. "There, run along," he said, with pity in his voice. "Do not come here again, Nanette." He made a swift sign over her. "God be with thee, Nanette," he said gently.

The girl fled from him, sobbing, and Hilary could hear her sobs after she had been hidden by the pines.

"Where is thy father?" asked the cure.

"He has gone to the store," faltered the girl. "Monsieur Tessier—"

"I shall say nothing," answered Father Lucien. "But do not let this happen again. Marie," he continued, "thou hast won the love of a good man."

Her face hardened, and she looked sullenly at the priest.

"A girl should think long before refusing a good man who loves her."

She cast her eyes down; and there was the incarnation of rebellious stubbornness in the rigid figure.

The captain's steps were heard, crushing the wood chips into the shingle. The old man came quickly forward into the arc of lamplight; quickly, as if he feared the realization of some terror gnawing at his heart. For a moment Hilary saw the pale gray eyes with the same menace upon his own. Then Dupont knew him.

"Bonjour, Monsieur Askew," he said, extending his hand.

He opened the cottage door, but the cure did not enter.

"Captain Dupont," he said, "there has been trouble between Monsieur Askew here and Monsieur Morris."

"I have heard of it," replied the captain.

"Ask him if he is willing to accept his orders from me," said Hilary.

The cure translated, and the captain answered him, stroking his gray beard and speaking with slow emphasis.

"It is all right," said Father Lucien finally. "Captain Dupont takes his freight where he finds it. He takes from your company in accordance with his contract. He will not break it. If Brousseau refuses him freight he can pick up all he needs on the south shore. You can rely on him."

Hilary felt deeply satisfied. If the captain was staunch, not Morris nor Brousseau nor all his men should prevent him from getting out a record cutting before navigation closed.

"Tell Dupont we'll keep him busy," Hilary said.

When he was with Father Lucien upon their homeward way he asked him a question about a matter that had puzzled him.

"Why does Dupont look at me as if I were his mortal enemy?" he asked.

"Ah, Monsieur Askew," said the cure, stopping to thump his stick upon the shingle, "there is a story there. So he looks at every man when first he meets him. He fears for the girl Marie—and unfortunately he is right in his fears. For she has her mother's nature."

"It was many years ago, nearly twenty, I think, and before I came here, when Capt. Jules Dupont was a fisherman in St. Boniface. He was married to Marie Letellier, who was much younger than he, and gay and thoughtless. People said it was an ill-matched match; but she loved him, and they were happy."

"When he left his young bride to go sealing off Newfoundland the tongues wagged, but he trusted her, and when he returned there was the child Marie, and a warm welcome. So three years passed."

"When Jules Dupont returned the fourth year his wife was gone. With whom? Nobody knew. I know more than anyone in St. Boniface, but I never knew. Some wanderer from the south shore; and six months later she was back with the child, pleading for forgiveness. He sheltered her until her death soon afterward. Since then his fear has been that Marie will have inherited the mother's nature. He never makes a voyage but he returns in fear and haste. And he wishes her to marry Jean-Marie Baptiste, who loves her—but you have seen tonight to what her mind is turning."

"The women recall her mother's fate, and their dislike has made her secretive and solitary. And it is lonely here, and Ste. Marie so near. Monsieur Askew, you saw the girl Nanette. She is from St. Joseph, of decent parents, who mourn for her. She was lured from her home to Ste. Marie, and I have fears that some one is using her as a tool to get the girl Marie Dupont into his clutches. But what can I do save watch and wait?"

"Therefore, Monsieur Askew," continued Father Lucien, much agitated, "I implore you to prevent this evil from spreading to St. Boniface. It is Brousseau who debauches those poor people there. It is he who is responsible for all this evil. He carries things for the people, so long as their votes for his creature in parliament at Quebec. And this, monsieur, was chiefly the cause of

visit to you tonight, to urge you

stop the brandy and the dance dancing out of St. Boniface, for I hear it being said that one of the Duvals boasts he will open a dance hall there."

"No brandy shall be sold on the St. Boniface property, Father Lucien."

"I am glad, monsieur," answered the cure. "But Simeon Duval and his brother Louis boast of Brousseau's protection, and they are dangerous men."

"You have my promise," said Hilary, "that they shall not sell liquor in St. Boniface. And by heaven I'll smash any man who tries to corrupt my people!" he added, with a vehemence that surprised himself.

Hilary slept poorly that night. Trouble seemed to be thickening about him. Had he, indeed, the power to handle these wild people whose very tongue he could hardly understand?

Then, out of the darkness, there rose, in vivid portrayal, the face of Madeleine Rosny. He admitted now how much she meant to him, enough to make any venture worth the while. He thought of their last meeting; and in spite of it he dared to dream of a happier one to come.

Before he fell asleep he had decided to go to Quebec and try to secure some jobber to take over Leblanc's lease. At the same time he would look up the land records and get an accurate idea of the extent of the Rosny seigniory.

Characteristically, he put his plan into practice two days later, when the dawn boat arrived, instructing Lefe to hold up the dynamiting till his return. Lefe saw him off, and he had hardly arrived on board before discovering that Morris had embarked at Ste. Marie. Hilary suspected him of having learned of his plan and spying on him. The two men eyed each other, but did not speak.

Hilary put up at the Frontenac, having business with the customs office with reference to a shipment of machinery, a small matter requiring a refund, he called there, and was disgusted to see Morris coming out of the revenue department in conversation with the assistant chief.

He failed entirely in his attempts to get a jobber to sublease Leblanc's tract. There were plenty of small men willing to do so on the installment system, but none willing to risk an immediate investment on a territory with such a reputation as St. Boniface had unjustly acquired.

Hilary knew he had to thank Morris

for that. He returned to St. Boniface next day with only one thing accomplished. He had seen the land map and ascertained that the upper reaches of Rocky river had been surveyed and that the creek was wholly on his own land. He found, too, with some surprise, that a large island out in the Gulf was part of the Rosny domain. It had not appeared on Morris' rough map.

Lefe, who met him at the wharf, looked worried.

"I'm glad you've come," he said, as they drove to the mill together. "Things were pretty bad on Saturday night."

"They're striking?"

"No, Mr. Askew. That's the brightest point in the situation. MacPherson, the foreman, tells me that it's called off. Brousseau's dropped that maneuver, for some reason of his own."

"What's the trouble, then?"

(Continued Next week)

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